

# The Open Mike<sup>District 2</sup>

---

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 3, Number 1

January 2007

## **A Moment at the Mike**

# The Education Learning Curve

As the new session of the County Council gets underway, I'm honored to have been selected as the chairman of our Education Committee. Education accounts for more than half of our county budget, and with the sheer weight of that staggering \$2 billion-plus investment comes the equally as important burden of ensuring the children—and adults—in our county have access to the best publicly-funded education system possible.

Taking the seat as the chair of the Education Committee is both a privilege and a humbling experience. For the last four years, I had the good fortune to serve under former Councilmember Mike Subin and witness firsthand his passion—and deftness!—for the issues. But I'll admit there are still many areas where I have some learning to do—and as readers of *The Open Mike* know, I've never been one who's afraid to ask for information. I've already begun the process of opening up the lines of communication and discussion, and I appreciate the input I've received from educators, parents, and others I've met with in the community. I intend to keep up this process of exploring the issues.



**Councilmember Mike Knapp**

One of the roles of the Education Committee, then, will be to keep the information and conversations going, and get people talking. I want us to work together as a community on these issues, and the surest way to do that is to talk to each other.

People are often surprised to learn that the County Council does not set the policy on education in Montgomery County. That responsibility falls to the members of the [Montgomery County Board of Education](#) that you've elected—and they take that responsibility seriously. But the Council has oversight of the funding for those programs and policies, so it's critical we work closely with the board and MCPS to look at what we're spending your money on.

For that reason, rather than view the education budget as a six-week document, to be examined and sent on its way when the recommended budget arrives from the County Executive, I hope to be constantly keeping an eye on what our investment is in education services, how much those

**continued on page 2**

# Education *(continued from page 1)*

services cost, and what we're getting for that investment. Education is a service the county essentially "purchases" each year from MCPS, and the council needs to understand what it's getting for your money. The Education Committee serves as the proxy for the community at large, and we need to constantly look to see that the community's demands and expectations regarding education are met, and that we're getting what we thought we paid for.

---

**It is my intent to ensure that our education is being delivered with the highest degree of integrity.**

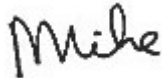
However, education in this county goes beyond the services we purchase or over which we exercise our oversight. The [University of Maryland](#) is a presence in our community, as is [Johns Hopkins University](#) and many other training schools and organizations. I hope to explore our education system as a comprehensive system in which our students know all the options available to them, whether it's enrollment in Montgomery College, at the University of Maryland, a small training school, or direct entry into the workforce—and whichever path they choose, we need to ensure they have the skills necessary to succeed.

---

Consistent with both of the above, then, it is my intent to ensure that our education is being delivered with the highest degree of integrity. That means we have programs and services that work, and that get the desired results: students that succeed, and leave high school prepared for their next step, whether that's college, the workforce, or something else. To do that, we'll need to constantly evaluate our programs, find out what's working, what's not and why.

Fortunately, I've got plenty of help. I'm in good company with committee members Phil Andrews and Valerie Ervin, and we look forward to meeting regularly to engage MCPS, Montgomery County's educators, administrators, policymakers, and the community on education. That's where you come in: [Stay in touch and let me know what you're thinking](#). It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,



Mike Knapp  
Councilmember, District 2

## Step Up to *The Open Mike* – Subscribe!

The Open Mike is an electronic newsletter published monthly by Councilmember Mike Knapp (District 2). If you would like to be added to the electronic distribution list, please visit the County Council's homepage at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov), and click on "Subscribe to Council Newsletters." At the prompt, check the box indicating you'd like to subscribe to information for "**District 2**" (more information can be found at the very bottom of this page)

## Residents, Owner Agree to Save COMSAT



**The COMSAT site in Clarksburg.**

After many months of negotiation and conversation, I'm pleased to announce that an agreement has been reached that will allow the major parts of the [COMSAT](#) building in Clarksburg to be saved.

Last June, [Montgomery Preservation Inc.](#) hosted a charette at Montgomery College for Clarksburg residents, preservationists and other advocates to discuss options to allow the [Cesar Pelli](#)-designed building to be preserved while still permitting it to be used. While I applauded the discussion, I was concerned that [LCOR](#), the company that owns the property and facility, was not included as part of the charette. I encouraged residents to keep talking, but also urged them to begin a dialogue with LCOR to find out what might be acceptable and possible for the use of the site. Through the autumn and winter, discussions continued, and I'm pleased with the mutually-agreed upon resolution.

The agreement will preserve the four main wings of the building, its two spines, interior courtyard, and portico. While the plans for the property are still considered a work in progress, ideally the COMSAT site will contain residential and commercial development centered around the [Corridor Cities Transitway](#) station envisioned for the property.

I'm pleased to have played a role in encouraging continued discussions, but the real credit goes to LCOR and residents and advocates who were able to negotiate the compromise agreement.

## Knapp Seeks Input on Options for Planned Retirement Communities

As part of a larger effort to meet the housing needs of our county, I've introduced two zoning text amendments to expand opportunities for the establishment of planned retirement communities in Montgomery County.

My first amendment, [ZTA 06-27](#), would amend the Planned Retirement Community (PRC) zone in a manner that makes the development standards appropriate for parcels less than 750 acres. These adjustments should have been made in 2002 when the minimum size for a PRC zone application was reduced from 750 acres to 25 acres. My amendment would accomplish the following:



1. There are fewer required uses (small projects are not required to have a golf course);
2. Open space and set back standards are reduced;
3. The provision for moderately priced dwelling units allows for the same bonus densities that are allowed in other residential zones;
4. Large setbacks are required when tall buildings adjoin residentially zoned property; and
5. The maximum height remains the same; however, the limit on the percentage of the site that can use the maximum height is removed.

***continued on page 4***

---

## Planned Retirement Communities *(continued from page 3)*

Prior to the fall of 2006, a request from a non-residential zoned property, for a residential zone that proposed less density, was determined to be in “substantial conformance” to the existing master plan. A recent opinion of the County Council, however, interpreted the Zoning Ordinance to require a specific recommendation by the master plan, before a residential zone could be applied to land zoned by a master plan for non-residential uses. I’d like us to reconsider this matter particularly as it applies to the Planning Retirement Community Zone.

---

**Currently, only one project in the county has used the PRC Zone, but I’ve introduced these amendments with an eye toward a larger discussion of our county housing needs.**

---

The companion amendment, [ZTA 06-26](#), would change the findings necessary to approve a PRC zone application. The amendment would permit the consideration of other zones even if those other zones were not mentioned in the relevant master plan. The Zoning Ordinance gives great deference to Master Plans. It does so even if the community, the Planning Board, the Hearing Examiner, and the County Council all agree that a change to the Planned Retirement Zone (or other floating zone) is in the public interest. The ZTA would permit everyone concerned to examine a proposed change in zoning on its merits; the recommendation of the master plan would be guide but would not be a bar to considering current needs.

Currently, only one project in the county has used the PRC Zone, but I’ve introduced these amendments with an eye toward a larger discussion of our county housing needs, especially among the elderly. The zoning recommended by

master plans is producing a housing shortage; and the population of the County is aging and will continue to age. It is my hope that these amendments will give citizens an opportunity to have a public conversation about these and other critical issues.

The Council held a hearing on my amendments on January 16, and the PHED committee will host a worksession on February 5. I’m interested in knowing your views as well, so [drop me a line](#) at Councilmember.Knapp@montgomerycountymd.gov

---

## Council Votes to Expedite Review of Growth Policy

In mid-December 2006, the County Council unanimously approved a resolution to expedite the review of Montgomery County’s Annual Growth Policy (AGP). The AGP—which was initially authorized back in 1964—provides the county’s guidelines for managing growth in the county, ideally by concentrating development where it can be served by public facilities, preserving open space, and encouraging excellence in urban design. Since 1986, the Council has reviewed the growth policy—sometimes annually, other times not—and enacted an adequate public facilities ordinance (APFO) which provides guidelines for transportation, schools, and other infrastructure.

Normally, the Council reviews the AGP in the fall. However, given the recent discussions about placing a county-wide moratorium on development, the Council has voted to begin the AGP process immediately after we complete action on the budget in late spring or early summer.

I’m interested in knowing what you think. For more information, visit the council’s website, then [e-mail me](#) with your comments.

## Ag Policy Working Group to Present Final Report on January 30

Since June 2006, the [County's Ad Hoc Agricultural Policy Working Group](#) has been meeting regularly to review a number of the county's agricultural policies, and advise the Council on appropriate actions or remedies. The working group is comprised of community members with a significant knowledge of the issues involved, including policy makers, environmentalists, community leaders and advocates, and farmers.

The group filed its final report in mid-January (to see a copy of the final report, visit the Council's homepage). The group will formally present its final report and recommendations to the full Council on January 30.

## Council Seeking Grant Applications

The Montgomery County Council strongly believes that partnering with non-profit organizations is critical to meeting County objectives in the areas of community development, economic development, education, health and human services, and education. To this end, the County Council is presently seeking applications for funding for projects that advance the County's services, goals, and objectives. Grants are also available for the arts and humanities, and for adult literacy or ESOL.

Any organization, institution, or association incorporated as a private, not-for-profit organization, designated as 501(c)(3) tax status, and which provides services or activities in Montgomery County is eligible to apply. An organization may seek funding, regardless of whether it has previously applied for County grants funds from programs such as the Community Development Block Grant or Community Services Grant programs.

***The deadline for applications is 4:00 p.m., Thursday, February 1, 2007.***

For more information, visit:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/doc/councilapplication-finalfy08.pdf>

## Olney Manor Skate Park Open For Business

In early January, the Montgomery County Department of Parks and the Montgomery County Recreation Department officially opened the [Olney Manor Skate Park](#) to the public. The 90-foot by 160-foot park has features for skaters of all skill levels. The skate park is open on a limited winter schedule with free admission for a limited time; however, skaters under age 18 must have a signed parent/guardian waiver to enter. Knee pads, elbow pads and helmets may be rented at the site.

The park is open Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., weather permitting, until March.. A full skating schedule will be released once winter weather breaks. In the interim, skaters can call 240-777-4979 for the latest schedule changes due to weather. The Olney Skate Park is located at Olney Manor Recreational Park, 16601 Georgia Avenue, directly behind the Olney Swim Center.



## Johnson Takes Helm at Montgomery College

The [Montgomery College Board of Trustees](#) recently named Dr. Brian K. Johnson as the college's newest president. Dr. Johnson will become the seventh chief executive officer in the College's 60-year history.

"I am so very honored and humbled that the Board of Trustees has chosen me as the next president of Montgomery College, one of the finest community colleges in America," said Dr. Johnson.

"Montgomery College is an outstanding institution that has benefited from great leadership, not only from President Nunley, but also from talented faculty and staff across the board who truly embrace a mission centered on students and learning. I'm looking forward to working cooperatively with the college community to build on what I truly see as an institution with 60 years of accomplishment."

Dr. Johnson brings 20 years of community college leadership experience to Montgomery College. Before his appointment as president, he served as chief executive officer of the Allegheny Campus and system senior vice president of student and community services at the [Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh](#). He provided executive oversight and strategic leadership of the Allegheny Campus, which has an annual enrollment of 20,000 students. He also provided leadership in student and community services for the entire system of four campuses and seven educational centers, totaling more than 18,000 full-time equivalent students.



**Dr. Brian K. Johnson**

Dr. Johnson has experience working in single college environments where the budget was \$70 million; multi-campus environments where the budget was \$90 million; and a multi-college district where the budget was in excess of half a billion dollars. Dr. Johnson's background also includes experience as a workforce educator in adult basic education/GED classes, student counselor, community college and university faculty member, and community organizer. He has taught English as a Second Language, and led and supervised Native American student programs.

[Montgomery College](#) is a public, open admissions community college that serves nearly 60,000 students a year, through both credit and noncredit programs, in more than 100 areas of study. Montgomery College employs more than 1,500 full time faculty, staff, and administrators and has a \$180.2 million tax-supported operating budget.

**Councilmember Mike Knapp**  
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850  
[\[Click here for a map.\]](#)  
(240) 777-7955

[Councilmember.Knapp@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Councilmember.Knapp@montgomerycountymd.gov)

**Help Wanted:****Noise Control Advisory Board Seeks New Member from District 2**

The County is seeking to fill a vacancy on the seven-member Noise Control Advisory Board. The board advises the County Executive, County Council, and Planning Board on noise control issues, as outlined in Montgomery County Code Chapter 31B. To see the county's noise ordinance policies, as well as the statute defining the role of the advisory group, [click here](#).

I will be nominating a representative from District 2 -- the district includes Barnesville, Clarksburg, Damascus, Germantown, Laytonsville, Montgomery Village, Olney, and Poolesville -- so if you're interested, [send me an e-mail](#), or drop me a line. No prior experience is necessary -- all that's required is a sense of community.

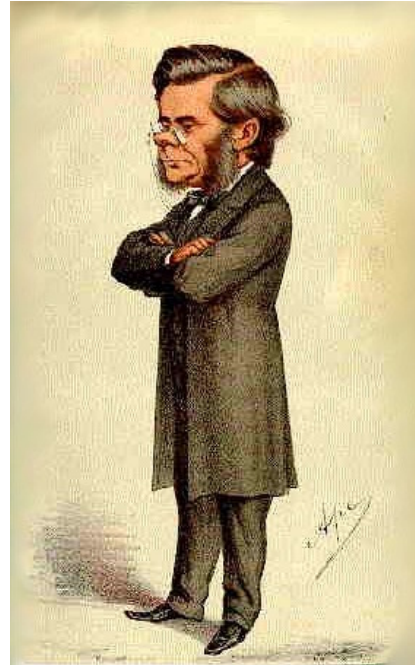
**The Upcounty Road Scholar****Temporary Traffic Signal For Skylark Road at MD 27**

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highways Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of *The Open Mike* provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community.

***The Road Scholar continues on page 8.***



***Got a question about roads, sidewalks, or construction in your area? [E-mail the Road Scholar](#) and let us know.***

## The Road Scholar *(continued from page 7)*

### Maryland State Highways Administration

**Clarksburg Update:** As a result of ongoing discussions with DPWT, I'm pleased to provide an update on the road situation in Clarksburg, largely focused on the intersection of Skylark and MD 27, but also pertaining to overall transportation in the area, such as accessibility to Rocky Hill Middle School. Given the various issues in the area, I think it's important to pass on, in its entirety, a message I recently received from Darrell Mobley, MSHA District Engineer for Montgomery County:

"My engineering staff has completed their study, and I would like to share some of the recent improvements in the area, as well as the findings with you. Please note that the SHA has spent a good portion of the last 14 months concentrating on traffic and safety concerns in the Clarksburg area. Members of my traffic engineering staff have met with residents, elected officials and attended numerous civic association and community workshops in an effort to better understand the needs and concerns of the community. During this process many of our Clarksburg customers have become partners in our efforts to provide safe and efficient roadways in this part of the county.



"Late in the summer of 2005 we became aware of concerns with ***accessibility to the new Rocky Hill Middle School from MD 355 (Frederick Road)***. A signal study was conducted and a new signal was installed at the MD 355 and Little Seneca Parkway intersection. During our investigation we discovered that the new Clarksburg High School being built to the north at Foreman Boulevard was slated for opening in the fall of 2006. Based on concerns with roadway alignment and heavy traffic along MD 355, another signal was installed at Foreman Boulevard.

"During the process of designing and installing these two new signals, we became aware of concerns with ***major delays at MD 355 and***

***Stringtown Road***. Upon further investigation it was discovered that both Skylark Road and Piedmont Road had been closed by developers in the area. This caused the delays along Stringtown Road but also increased the potential for conflict for motorists wishing to turn left from Clarksburg Road onto southbound MD 355. To resolve these issues the SHA, in coordination with Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (MCDPWT), approved the installation of an interim signal at the MD 355 and Stringtown Road intersection and added a left-turn phase for Clarksburg Road traffic to the existing signal at MD 355.

"With the knowledge that Little Seneca Parkway, as well as Snowden Farm Parkway, would ultimately intersect MD 27 between Brink Road and Skylark Road, the SHA initiated a corridor study. The study area along MD 27 runs between MD 355 and Kings Valley Road with the intent of planning traffic control along the corridor.

***The Road Scholar continues on page 9.***



## The Road Scholar *(continued from page 8)*

"With the pending reopening of Skylark Road, residents from the Clarksburg area requested that **SHA consider a left-turn/by-pass lane along MD 27 northbound at Skylark Road as well as a traffic signal.** The SHA conducted a traffic count at the intersection once all of the closed roadways had been reopened. In addition, pavement depths on the shoulder along MD 27 were reviewed to assess the viability of a left-turn lane. The study indicated that a traffic signal was not warranted and the pavement depths along the MD 27 shoulder indicated that the shoulder area was not traffic bearing; that is, it could not sustain through traffic volumes without failing.

"As a result, in conjunction with DPWT, SHA re-stripped MD 27 to include a bypass lane at Skylark Road. In addition to the by-pass lane, the approach to MD 27 along Skylark Road was re-stripped to provide two lanes which allow safer access with less delay onto MD 27. In addition to these improvements, based on a SHA lighting study, overhead lighting will be provided at the intersection. This will enhance safety at the intersection and should be completed later this month.

"At the present time many members of the community have requested that SHA install a traffic signal as well as a left-turn lane along northbound MD 27 at Skylark Road. Once again to determine the feasibility of a traffic signal at this location a new traffic count and warrant study was completed. In addition to this study, the SHA is also considering the findings of the aforementioned corridor study along MD 27 between MD 355 and Kings Valley Road. The corridor study determined that:

---

**"A traffic signal may be required at MD 27's intersection with the 4-lane Little Seneca Parkway which is slated for completion in the year 2012 . . . In light of the fact that the Little Seneca Parkway tie-in will not be completed until 2012, SHA has decided to install an interim traffic signal at the MD 27 and Skylark Road intersection."**

---

- A traffic signal will be required at MD 27's intersection with the 4-lane Snowden Farm Parkway which is slated for completion in the year 2010 (developer schedule per Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS)).
- A traffic signal may be required at MD 27's intersection with the 4-lane Little Seneca Parkway which is slated for completion in the year 2012 (developer schedule per DPS).
- No traffic signal is indicated at Skylark Road due to its proximity with Little Seneca Parkway (800 foot separation).

"The results of our recently completed signal warrant analysis at MD 27 at Skylark Road also indicate that, at the present time, a traffic signal is not warranted at that location. Insofar as the northbound MD 27 left-turn lane, please note that a developer working under an SHA access permit is presently conditioned to make improvements along MD 27 at the Skylark Road intersection. These improvements include southbound MD 27 deceleration and acceleration lanes at Skylark Road as well as a northbound left-turn lane at Skylark Road. A meeting with the developer regarding these improvements was held the week of November 27th. At that time SHA requested that the improvements be expedited based on concerns with traffic safety along the corridor. The developer indicated that the requested improvements would be completed by September of 2007.

***The Road Scholar continues on page 10.***

## The Road Scholar *(continued from page 9)*

"SHA is concerned with traffic operations and safety and how they are affected by the rapid rate of development in the Clarksburg area. **In light of the fact that the Little Seneca Parkway tie-in will not be completed until 2012, SHA has decided to install an interim traffic signal at the MD 27 and Skylark Road intersection.** This signal is temporary until such time as the Little Seneca Parkway tie-in to MD 27 is complete. At that time it is expected that traffic volumes will be redistributed due to the opening of the new roadway. When this occurs we will re-evaluate both intersections to determine the required traffic control. We expect that this evaluation will likely result in the removal of the signal at Skylark Road. The temporary signal at Skylark Road will be installed to coincide with the developer improvements along MD 27 and should be operational by September of 2007.

"SHA is committed to its partnership with the Clarksburg community and will continue to monitor conditions along both MD 355 and MD 27."

### Department of Public Works and Transportation

**Golf Estates Repaving (Laytonsville/Olney):** I am pleased to announce that DPWT has advised me Golf Estates Drive is scheduled for resurfacing in July 2007. DPWT will continue additional patching as necessary to have the road ready for its resurfacing by summer.

## Council Seeks Input on Transportation Priorities

Don't be shy! The County Council regularly holds public hearings at which we actively seek your input, thoughts, comments, and suggestions. The policies, amendments, and legislation under consideration aren't just pieces of paper; they have a very real impact on you and the lives of your fellow citizens. For this reason, residents are always encouraged to attend the public hearings and give us your views.

Hearings are held in the Council's main meeting room on the 7th Floor of the County Office Building at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville. If you wish to testify on any of the items listed below, please call (240) 777-7931. One more thing -- the hearing schedule can change rapidly, so always check the [County Council's home page](#) to get the most up-to-date information.

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
January 23	7:30 p.m.	Bill 48-06, Streets and Roads - Comprehensive Revisions
	7:30 p.m.	Subdivision Regulation Amendment 06-04, Streets and Roads - Design Standards
January 25	7:30 p.m.	Public Forum on Montgomery County's Transportation Priorities
January 30	1:30 p.m.	Supplemental Appropriation to the County Government's FY 2007 Operating Budget: - Fire and Rescue Service: \$243,680 for Staffing Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant
	1:30 p.m.	Special Appropriation to the County Government's FY 2007 Operating Budget: - DHHS: \$1,157,860 for Immigrant Health Initiative Grant

## **Vox Pops**

### **Voices From Around the Upcounty Community**

*A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny . . . but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.*

#### **Slow Growth: Reduce Property Taxes**



"The housing market is in a down turn and our property values are being reduced by the market conditions, I ask that you take this into consideration by either reducing the personal property tax rate or reducing the assessment rate on our properties. The rates that the assessors office has put on our properties has declined and assessments should also declined in line with the market conditions. As much as the Council would like to get as much money from the tax payers as possible every year, this is not or should not be your main purpose to exist. I know the County needs many dollars to exist and grow but it is time to step back and breath. The County needs to grow at a slower pace.

"I do not understand why this generation thinks they have to have everything right now. It seems that people today cannot wait for growth, they want it now. I think this includes the County Council. The Council wants as much as possible now, today, they do not want to wait for tomorrow or another year. This approach is causing many tax payers to take a hard look at what the Council is doing. Raising taxes just so you can get what you want today instead of waiting until next year is really putting a crunch on our taxes for which I feel are out of sight and need to be reduced, not increased." -- Steven

#### **Oppose Any Proposed Gas Taxes**

"What on earth is going on? Ike hasn't had time to warm up his seat and he is wanting a gas tax increase and an increase in the vehicle registration fee. We did not hear a word about cutting excessive and bloated offices or programs. We urge you to resist any tax and fee increases." -- Don and Margie

#### **Safety Is More Than Just A Pedestrian Issue**

"As a person who once walked to work when living and working in Germantown, I am sensitive to the needs of pedestrians. And I would like to report to you that in the Germantown-area (especially), I regularly see individuals crossing busy roads outside of walkways at night wearing dark clothing. While I am cautious to generalize, it does seem that many of these individuals may not be native born citizens; and may therefore be unaware of the basic safety rules for navigating our sometimes dangerous roads.



"I encourage you to consider measures that would require new county citizens to demonstrate proficiency in walking safety - perhaps as part of a requirement for working and/or driving. This goes for automobile licensees as well, who frequently pose a danger even to safety-aware pedestrian (including public transportation workers, one of whom nearly ran me over two years ago with his bus!)." -- Michael